released by the Central Government for those roads; and

(c) the response of the Central Government to the above proposal?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI M. RAJASEKARA MURTHY): (a) to (c) The State Govt. of Maharashtra has been representing from time to time for declaration of certain roads as new National Highways. During the 8th Plan, the State Government has forwarded 11 proposals of State roads to be declared as National Highways. As the funds allocated during the 8th Plan for National Highways are not even adequate to meet the developmental needs of the existing routes, it is difficult to declare the above State roads as New National Highways at present stage.

Extension of postal network in backward States

380. SHRI BHAGABANMAJHI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the reasons that the postal network has not been expanded adequately in the backward States like Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar;

(b) whether it is far from satisfactory in the tribal regions in these States;

(c) if so, the steps taken to pay adequate attention in the expansion of postal network in these States; and

(d) the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION (SHRI SUKH RAM): (a) Postal network has duly expanded in Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. The average area and population served per Post Office in these States, compared with all-India average are as follows:—

	All India	Orissa	Bihar	Madhya Pradesh
Area served per P.O. (sq. km.)	21.48	19.28	14.70	26.55
Population served per P.O.	5526	3922	7423	5897

(b) No, Sir, Tribal areas in these States have been receiving due attention in development.

(c) and (d) Does not arise in view of (a) & (b) above.

Demand for Cellular Phones

381. SHRI RAHASBIHARI BARIK: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether steps have been taken by Government to introduce cellular phone service in additional areas in the country;

(b) whether he is aware of the increasing response and demand for providing cellular phone service;

(c) if so, the year by which the cellular phone service would be provided in the entire country; and

(d) the steps taken to improve the existing phone services in the entire country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION (SHRI SUKH RAM): (a) and (b) Yes Sir.

(c) The service has already started in Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta & Madras. The service is likely to start in many cities in the rest of the country by the end of 1996.

(d) The steps taken to improve the existing phone services are given below:—

(i) Introduction of new electronic exchanges,

(ii) Phasing out of old and life expire electro-mechanical exchanges,

(iii) Introduction of optical fibre and digital microwave systems for interexchange junctions,

(iv) Computerisation of various services,

(v) Upgradation of external plant; and

(vi) Improved customer interface.

Use of Polythene Bags

382. SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been invited to the hazards of extensive use of polythene bags to the environment as published in the news-item Environment—Siri Siri bags that choke cities which appeared in 'The Hindustan Times' of 25th September, 1995;

(b) if so, the reaction of Government thereto;

(c) what steps Government propose to take to discharge the use of polythene in packing materials and its recycling; and

(d) the names of countries which have banned the use of polythene as packaging material and its contact with food items?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI RAJESH PILOT): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The use of polythene bags as such is not harmful to the environment in the manner brought out in the news item under reference.

(c) There are no plans to discourage the use of polythene as a packing material or its recycling, as there is no viable and energy saving substitute for it. Polythene is an ideal material for packaging many items including food items. Polythene can be recycled with ease.

(d) Based on the information available there is no ban on use of polythene as packaging material of food items.

Exploitation of Forest Land for Diamond Mining

383. SHRI RAHASBIHARI BARIK: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the large scale exploitation of forest land for diamond mining in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh;

(b) if so, the total forest land being harnessed in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh for diamond mining;

(c) the date on which Government have approved the above two State Governments' proposals of diamond mining; and

(d) the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI RAJESH PILOT): (a) and (b) Prior approval of the Central Government is required under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 for diversion of forest land for non-forest purpose including mining of diamonds. No proposal under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 for diversion of forest land for mining of diamonds in Madhya Pradesh or Orissa is pending with the Ministry as on 31.10.1995.

(c) and (d) Do not arise.